

INAUGURATION AUGURY

1817 & 1825

A Newspaper Story Source Book

Compiled by Peter Oehlkers

Introduction.

The root of “inauguration” is “augury,” the Roman art of divination using the flight of birds. While this connection may be surprising to contemporary readers, it was not to political commentators in the early 1800s. When an eagle was said to have flown over the Capitol during the inauguration of James Monroe in 1817, newspapers were quick to report it, comment on it, contest it, and make fun of each other over it. This was repeated in 1825, when four eagles were reported in the skies over Washington during the inauguration of John Quincy Adams.

Unlike an earlier era of American journalism, in which such events might have been taken as real portents, there is little sense that these eagle flights were taken seriously as omens. That did not stop newspaper commentators, however, from offering possible interpretations, and in a more ornithological vein, from wondering if the birds had been correctly identified. If they were in fact turkey vultures, crows, or “shitepokes” instead of eagles, might that not suggest other divine meanings?

In the pages that follow I have reprinted the newspaper stories I was able to find about the inauguration “eagles.” There is much that will be obscure to readers unfamiliar with the tropes of early 19th century U.S. political culture. I will do my best to explain what I’ve been able to decipher, but it will take a genuine historian to do full explications. One thing is clear. Birds and particular bird species had symbolic significance in political discourse that far exceeds what one sees today (Joe Biden and “On Eagle’s Wings” excepted).

Eagle-based presidential augury would return to newspapers in the 1840s in connection with William Henry Harrison. Those stories are not included in this volume, but might be incorporated into a later edition.

At the time of this writing, the next presidential inauguration is still over two months away. This is enough time for someone (not me) to do a nice feature story. I invite anyone interested in this task to make full use of the collected material to follow.

Some historical reminders:

James Monroe, a Democratic-Republican, had won the Presidency in a landslide over Rufus King, the Federalist candidate. The War of 1812 was a very recent event, only concluded in 1815, and was still on the public’s mind. Federalists, generally anti-war and located primarily in the northeast, were seen as pro-Britain; Democratic-Republicans were more strongly associated with France (and Napoleon). This was the last presidential election to feature a Federalist candidate, though the party continued to have adherents among newspaper publishers.

The presidential election of 1824 featured four candidates, all Democratic-Republicans: John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, William Crawford, and Henry Clay. None of them won the plurality of electoral votes so the election was decided in the House of Representatives. Andrew Jackson (Tennessee) and Henry Clay (Kentucky) represented the emerging political power of the “West.”

1817

Extracts from the Letter of an English Gentleman in
Washington to his Friend in Baltimore, dated March 7.

A very singular and a very interesting circumstance took place whilst the new President was addressing his fellow citizens—An Eagle flew directly over the Capitol—This, in ancient Rome, at the inauguration of a Consul, would have been considered a most auspicious omen—I reflected on this curious circumstance and inwardly prayed, that the American Eagle and the British Lion might never again enter into mortal strife—But I have my fears—It is scarcely possible for rival nations long to continue at peace—Conflicting interests will arise and mischief-making politicians will urge them to an appeal to the Sword, instead of appealing to Justice.

American and Commercial Daily Advertiser March 10, 1817.

This was a single paragraph in a longer set of extracts from a letter written by the British visitor to the United States.

Messrs. Editors.—An English gentleman in a communication published in yesterday's American, that "a very singular and very interesting circumstance took place while the new President was addressing his fellow citizens—An Eagle flew directly over the Capitol—"This," continued he, "in ancient Rome, at the inauguration of a Consul, would have been considered a most auspicious omen." Now Messrs. Editors, having made ancient augury very much my study—I should like to be informed in what direction this said Eagle flew over the capitol—or whether it was a he or a she Eagle—If it was a she Eagle flying in the direction of Montgomery Court-House, I should think the omen very infavourable—but if a he one, flying towards Bladensburg, a very favorable one.

W.

Courier, March 15, 1817

The *Baltimore Telegraph and Federal Republican* was the *American's* Federalist rival. While I have been unable to find the original *Telegraph* story, it was reprinted in other papers and is reconstructed above. The references to "Montgomery Court-House" (to the west) and "Bladensburg" (to the east) point to events in the War of 1812. Bladensburg was the scene of a notorious American retreat.

It is well known to every person at all acquainted with ancient history, that the heathen nations were accustomed, on the most interesting occasions, to consult the augurs and prognosticators, and as they answered, or as the omens appeared, so they regulated their conduct. The appearance of a bird, or a flock of birds, the predicament in which they found the entrails of their victims at the sacrifice, &c. &c. have inspired armies to victory and triumph, or withheld them from battle for fear of defeat and disgrace. We did not know, however, that this system of foretelling events had been introduced at Washington. It is a fact that there has been a strong disposition, in a certain great character [Thomas Jefferson] who resided there for eight years soon after the government was transferred to that place, to give it a kind of Romanish, that is, a heathenish, character. The building in which Congress met was called the “Capitol”—the spot on which it stood the “Mons Capitolinus,” or Capitol Hill—the place where the Chief Magistrate’s house stood was fairly entitled to be called, and, if we are not mistaken, was by many persons called “Mons Palatinus”—a brook which runs through part of the city, and emptied into the Potomac, which passed originally by the appropriate name of Goose-creek, was changed by Mr. Jefferson into the more sonorous, dignified and classical, “Tyber.” Now, it seems, the omens have commenced their reign. “An Eagle flew directly over the Capitol,” says an English gentleman,” “whilst Mr. Monroe was addressing his fellow-citizens.” We hope this foreigner did not intend, in this sly mode, to utter a sarcasm. And yet, when we recollect to what country he belongs, and bring to mind other circumstances connected with the place, and the subject of the omen, if the bird was not seen by anybody but by him, we shall entertain but little charity for him.

One thing, however, we cannot but regret, viz. That in the summer of 1814, the Roman system had not been carried to a somewhat greater extent, so that a very different sort of bird from an Eagle might have hovered over Mr. Monroe’s head, and proved the means of saving the Capitol.

Courier, March 15, 1817

The *Charleston Courier* (a Federalist paper) reprinted the *Telegraph* story on the previous page and added the above interpretation.

This installation seems to have excited more curiosity than any previous event of the kind. Many persons came from a considerable distance to witness it. And certainly the City of Washington never pretended so gay and so numerous an assemblage. The weather was peculiarly favorable, it being a delightful spring day. We hope it may prove a happy presage of the prosperous character of Mr. M's administration. It is said, however, that a more decisive omen of the future destinies of our country was discovered, in the flight of an eagle over the capitol during the inauguration.—We did not see it ourselves, but we heard it spoken of by many.

Salem Gazette 1817 03 21

The *Georgetown Messenger*, in a longer story about the inauguration, offered independent confirmation that the eagle had been seen by others than the English gentleman. I have not been able to find the original story, but I include a fragment reprinted in other papers above.

A gentleman of this place, on hearing the above story related, suggested the possibility of the bird spoken of being, a s—p—e! —It is certainly immaterial, as its flight would be as ominous of good as that of the eagle.—It will be remembered that the sycophants of Napoleon Bonaparte told the people of France that whilst that chieftain was receiving the vows of his perjured dignitaries at the Champ de Mars, after his return from Elba, an eagle hovered over the champ, as it were to witness the bold work and give assurance of future victory! In less than one short month, the power of Napoleon departed from him—he was a prisoner, and his sycophants celebrated the restoration of Louis 18th!—The flight of six vultures proved a bad omen to Remus, and twelve a favorable one to Romulus! but the days of Roman superstition are past, and the destinies of nations, we hope, no longer depend upon the flight of birds.

Salem Gazette 1817 03 21

The *Franklin Repository* of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, was a Federalist paper. It reprinted the *Georgetown Messenger* story and added the comment above. I've been unable to find the original story, but I include what was reprinted in other papers. Note that "shitepoke" was a colloquial name for the heron, known for its profusive pre-flight defecations.

It is rather ludicrous to a discerning mind when we perceive the twinges and twists which are given in some federal papers to every thing the prominent features of which might tend to the aggrandizement of the republican party. In a late federal paper at the suggestion of some sapskull, the editor in commenting on a paragraph from the Georgetown Messenger respecting the flight of an Eagle over the capitol at the inauguration of Mr. Monroe, suggested the probability of the bird's being a s—p—e. True it is, the “gentleman” might be correct in his observations for we confess to the naked eye things in the air and other elements too, sometimes wear a very deceiving aspect, and in fact, altho’ we do not profess to be the most sharp sighted people in the world, if himself (not withstanding he is much larger than an Eagle about the head) had been flying over capitol hill and we placed in a convenient situation to make astronomical observations, we certainly would have been so much imposed upon by his similarity to the bird as to call him a s—p—e, and it would, as the learned commentator remarks be “immaterial” as they are nearly at par!

Democratic Republican March 17, 1817

The *Democratic Republican* of Chambersburg was the Democratic-Republican rival of the *Repository*.

The southern papers are quarreling about the species of birds that flew over the Capitol during the late Presidential inauguration—one had it an EAGLE, another a CROW, and a third an OWL. The omen cannot be given satisfactorily, unless it be ascertained to which species of the feathered tribe the bird belongs.

New-York Gazette March 17, 1817

I've been unable to find the specific stories referred to above.

Wonderful!! An Eagle as a Crow.

It is rumored that the eagle that flew over the capital in honor of Mr. Monroe's nomination, turns out to be a Crow, which the democrats there assembled mistook for the bird of Jove.

Columbian Museum March 21, 1817

The *Columbian Museum* was a Federalist paper based in Savannah, Georgia.

A bird flew over the Capitol at the moment of Mr. Monroe's inauguration. Observers do not agree what bird it was. Whatever it was, its visit was a favorable omen! If an Eagle, it denotes dignity and power—if an Owl, wisdom—if a Crow, sagacity—if a Buzzard, diplomatic skill—if a Goose, plenty!

New England Palladium & Commercial Advertiser March 21, 1817

The *New England Palladium* doesn't seem to have clear party allegiances.

An Error Corrected

We stated two or three days since, upon the authority of the Federal Republican, that the Eagle which flew over the capital at the time of Mr. Monroe's nomination, was a crow. Upon a further examination of this momentous subject, we discover that we committed a great error, and we now candidly acknowledge it. It appears that the supposed eagle was not a crow but a Turkey-buzzard! Its flight was toward Montgomery court-house. We humbly beg pardon for our mistake, and hope it will be a warning to all editors, and brother typos, who are in the habit of publishing weighty facts, without sufficiently examining into their correctness.

Columbian Museum March 26, 1817

The *Columbian Museum*, which had declared Monroe's eagle to be a crow, made a "correction," now claiming the eagle to be a turkey buzzard. It is worth dwelling for a moment on the rhetorical uses, during this era, of this particular pairing.

In a speech widely circulated in 1817, Thomas P. Grosvenor, complimented John C. Calhoun (not yet the political operator he would later become):

Mr. Speaker...The buzz of popular applause may not cheer him on his way—but he will inevitably arrive at a high and happy elevation in the view of his country and the world—and to those who surrender their conscience, their judgment and their independence, at the shrine of popular caprice and clamor, he shall finally hold the same relation that the Eagle in his towering flight holds to the groveling Buzzard. (Hampshire Gazette. March 5, 1817)

A doubtful Bird.

One of the southern gazettes asserts, that during a late inauguration an Eagle was seen hovering over the Capitol at Washington—Another paper denies this, and declares, that the spectators were divided in opinion on the subject;—some averring it to be a Turkey Buzzard;—some a Wild Goose; —others a Hawk, (not a War one [see Henry Clay]) while a large majority were confident it was nothing but a Gull.

Dartmouth Gazette March 26, 1817

“Gull” in the sense of “to fool” and “gullibility” was widely used during this time in newspaper discourse.

An Eagle

With regard to that stupendous important affair of an eagle's flying over the capitol while president Monroe was inaugurated, we are assured that it was an eagle—yes, ye gods, it was an eagle. The matter turns out to be this, that a live eagle was kept by a sculptor as a model, and in honor of the day was let loose, and, astonishingly as the tale may appear, he did actually spread his wings and fly. Now had an eagle alighted on the capitol at that time, it might have furnished some pretext for all this uproar of the newspapers; but what favorable augury is to be derived from his aerial majesty's flying away at that moment, we are at a loss to discover—it might properly be called the Bladensburg race of an eagle.

Columbian Museum March 27, 1817

This was credited to The *Baltimore Telegraph and Federal Republican*. I can't find the original story, but it was widely reprinted.

When our Correspondent (the English gentleman now on his travels in this country) informed us of an Eagle flying over the Capitol whilst the ceremony of the inauguration of Mr. Monroe was performing, we did not consider it a very extraordinary circumstance, as the American Eagle, since the year 1812, has made itself conspicuous in many places, both on land and water—The Opposition Editors, however, with their usual industry, seized the opportunity of making their customary jokes and invidious remarks on the circumstance, indicating their attachment to the English Lion rather than to the American Eagle—We have heard of flying Griffins, but, we believe, the utmost stretch of Heraldic ingenuity has never imagined flying Lions—The Lion, when properly guided, is a noble animal—It was not the British Lion that destroyed Washington—It was a Tiger dressed in a Lion's skin.

Amongst the number of ill-numbered remarks on this occasion, we copy the following article from an Eastern paper [*New England Palladium*], as it displays some ingenuity, and but little party asperity—"Observers (says this Eastern critic) do not agree what bird it was that flew over the Capitol at Mr. Monroe's inauguration— Whatever it was, its visit was a favorable omen! If an Eagle, it denotes dignity—if an Owl, wisdom—if a Crow, sagacity—if a Buzzard, diplomatic skill—if a Goose, peace and plenty!"

American and Commercial Daily Advertiser March 28, 1817

1825

To the Editors

A curious and interesting spectacle was, on Friday, witnessed, by several gentlemen, from the top of the Capitol, during the ceremony of the inauguration of President Adams. No less than four large Eagles were seen poising themselves directly over the Capitol for about ten minutes, when one of them, apparently larger than the rest, began to descend, and after making a number of circles around the centre down, arose in graceful spirals, and they all wheeled off to the West.

Was their attention attracted by the immense concourse of people about the place? or was this the parent eagle which before made her appearance, in almost the same place, when our last venerable Chief Magistrate was inducted into office, now sent by our guardian spirit, with her brood, from their mountain eyre, to augur continued and increased prosperity to our happy country?

S.

Daily National Intelligencer March 7, 1825

The *National Intelligencer*, an explicitly Democratic-Republican paper, published in Washington, D.C., by Joseph Gales, Jr and William Winston Seaton had been effectively, during the Madison and Monroe administrations, the official paper of the U.S. government.

The Four Eagles changed into Crows

The Editor of the *National Intelligencer*, whose opposition to Mr. Adams has been notoriously bitter, finding that Mr. Adams, by the assistance of Clay, had thrown trumps! found it convenient to wheel to the right-about; and to let the knowing ones see that his conversion was sincere, got up a ridiculous story of four Eagles hovering over the Capitol during the inauguration of the President.—The wonders accomplished at Washington through the agency and prayers of Prince Hohenlohe, were nothing to this flight of Eagles. Young women fainted, old women got the hysterics, children screamed, hens crowed, and even cats barked and dogs mewed, at this wonderful wonder of wonders, which appeared in the *Intelligencer*. The mystery, however, is at last removed. It seems, a gentleman killed thirty-five crows at a shot. The remaining four crows of this unhappy flock, frightened from their food, and very hungry, flew over the Capitol, where a carcase of loaves and fishes were ready for distribution, allured no doubt by the scent; but finding they had all been already bargained for and sold, they flew off again. This is the true history of the four black crows, which the distempered imagination of the *Intelligencer*-men magnified into eagles.

Evening Post March 11, 1825

The *New York Evening Post*, founded as by Alexander Hamilton as a Federalist party paper, had a long-standing feud with its political opponent, the *National Intelligencer*. The *Intelligencer* had supported William Crawford for president and was in danger of losing its "official" status. "Prince Hohenloe," was a reference to a notorious faith healer of this era.

It is stated in the *National Intelligencer* as a remarkable fact, that during the inauguration of John Q. Adams, four large Eagles were seen hovering over the Capitol. This would have been perhaps worthy of notice had it been true; but the real facts of the case are, that these supposed Eagles were Turkey Buzzards which are very numerous there.

American Statesman and City Register March 12, 1825

The Boston-based *American Statesman* had been virulently anti-Adams. Its transformation of the eagles into turkey vultures is both allegory and an ornithological possibility.

“A curious and interesting spectacle was, on Friday, witnessed, by several gentlemen, from the top of the Capitol, during the ceremony of the inauguration of President Adams. No less than four large Eagles were seen poising themselves directly over the Capitol for about ten minutes, when one of them, apparently larger than the rest, began to descend, and after making a number of circles around the centre down, arose in graceful spirals, and they all wheeled off to the West.”

Such an occurrence in Rome would have furthered fruitful matter of augury; and perhaps some of our own soothsayers may consider the omens to be explanatory of the future, as they were illustrative of the present.

New-York American for the Country March 12, 1825

The *American* had supported Adams for president.

Omens.

It is stated in the Washington papers that four Eagles were seen hovering over the Capitol during the Inauguration and that they afterwards flew to the westward. We are not sufficiently skilled in augury to undertake a divination, but why may we not consider these “sovereigns of the air” as representing on this occasion, the presence of the surviving predecessors of Mr. Adams, and as denoting, by the direction of their flight, the quarter whence are to arise his successors?

Salem Literary and Commercial Observer March 12, 1825

John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe were still alive at this date. Adams and Jefferson would die in 1826. Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson were from the west.

“A curious and interesting spectacle was, on Friday, witnessed, by several gentlemen, from the top of the Capitol, during the ceremony of the inauguration of President Adams. No less than four large Eagles were seen poising themselves directly over the Capitol for about ten minutes, when one of them, apparently larger than the rest, began to descend, and after making a number of circles around the centre down, arose in graceful spirals, and they all wheeled off to the West.”

We copy the following article from the National Intelligencer of Monday last, with but one remark—Eagles are as plenty in the vicinity of Washington as Crows are in Malden woods.

Boston Commercial Gazette March 14. 1825

As far as I can tell, this remark about the abundance of crows in Malden woods was not a common expression. Malden, Massachusetts is now largely deforested but was once considered a wild region complete with wolves.

Our Religion in danger.

The Saturnian ages have come, and with them Pagan Divinity. Already is the augury of the flight of birds established—four Eagles were seen poising sublimely over the Capitol on the day of the Inauguration, whom to represent, God only knows. Mr. Adams, we would venture to consider an Eagle “above our archery,” if his friends will have it so; but how to guess at the others, is to us darker than a Delphic response. Could they have come for the new heads of the several departments? —we hardly think it. They may be clever birds, but there are others of as broad a wing and as keen an eye. But, perhaps, it may be divined that, the Vice President was there represented, and the other two, who flew away, were the geniuses of the “Military Chieftan” and the late Secretary of the Treasury. This solution may not suit the present Priests of Apollo, who explain every omen which happened on the “ides of March” in their own way. The soothsayers of old allowed no one to doubt of their divinations—in the present day, however, the cannons are mended, and a little skepticism may be tolerated.

Boston Commercial Gazette March 14, 1825

The Vice President was John C. Calhoun, the “Military Chieftan” was Andrew Jackson, and the “late Secretary of the Treasury” was William Crawford.

No age of the world, of which we have ever read, has been so noted for the occurrence of auguries, and omens, and miracles, and interesting spectacles, as the present. An account of all the prodigies that have happened during the present year, alone, would fill several volumes. The last occurrence of the kind, which has come to our knowledge, is related by a writer in the *National Intelligencer* of Monday last. . .

“A curious and interesting spectacle was, on Friday, witnessed, by several gentlemen, from the top of the Capitol, during the ceremony of the inauguration of President Adams. No less than four large Eagles were seen poising themselves directly over the Capitol for about ten minutes, when one of them, apparently larger than the rest, began to descend, and after making a number of circles around the centre down, arose in graceful spirals, and they all wheeled off to the West.”

Eastern Argus [Portland, Maine] March 14, 1825

This commentary is from the *Boston Courier* (I cannot find the original).

A marvelous story is told in the *National Intelligencer* of four Eagles hovering over the Capitol on the day of Inauguration; that one of them descended, in graceful movements, nearly down to the centre dome; and after enjoying the scenes going on below, ascended to join its comrades when they all wheeled off to the West.—Now, notwithstanding Mr. Noah's surmise that this was nothing more than a flock of geese, and that it was the old gander that descended—and notwithstanding Mr. Green's conjecture that it was a flock of Turkey Buzzards—the true explanation of this singular event is, this: the four eagles are the four candidates for the Presidency—that the one which descended was the successful competitor—that their movement to the west is a literal fulfillment of John Randolph's prophecy, "westward the march of empire bends its way," and that Mr. Adams' successor is to come from the west. If this is not a true solution of the phenomenon, then there is no logic in birds.

Newburyport Herald March 15, 1825

Mordecai Manuel Noah was editor of the *National Advocate* in 1825 but while I can find a reprint of the *Intelligencer* article on March 10, I can't find the goose comment above. Nathaniel Greene was editor of the *American Statesman and City Register* (see March 12 story above).

Another Gull Story

The National Intelligencer tells a wonderful tale about “four large eagles” being seen over the capitol at the time of the Inauguration of Mr. Adams, the largest of which descended in sundry circles about the dome of the capitol and the “wheeled off to the West.” Those of our readers who remember eight years ago, doubtless recollect that this same Intelligencer regaled the public with a similar story at the Inauguration of Mr. Monroe. It was then ascertained by persons skilled in ornithology that the supposed eagles were only gulls, a species of birds very common around the Potomac and Susquehanna at this season of the year. Hundreds of them may be seen circling through the air, over those large rivers of all colors, some of a brilliant white, others of a dusky grey, that might be mistaken for an eagle at a distance. We hope the worthy Editors of the Intelligencer will not tax our gravity again with such ‘tales for infant minds.’ They should be apprised that their own credulity is not a safe rule by which to measure that of other people. The good people of Washington would do well to keep their eagle-portents and their Hohenloe-miraculous cures to themselves, praise heaven and say nothing about them.

Hallowell (Maine) Gazette March 16, 1825

As mentioned before, gulls are an alternative identification for eagles here as well as a suitable allegorical choice.

We have observed that our fellow citizens of the national metropolis have revived with great spirit the ancient augury by the flight of birds. Who have acted as the haruspices, whether Gales & Seaton or Davis & Force, we know not; but certain it is, that, as under the kings and on the election of consuls in Rome, so at the inauguration of President, the auspices were duly consulted. The priests have announced that four eagles were seen at that time sailing over the Capitol, and they have accepted the omen as happy. Those people who have not had faith in the miracle wrought by the instrumentality of Prince Hohenloe at the seat of government and near it, are also skeptical as to these heathenish auspices; but they have no reason, to be so; for the good people of Washington have the eagle as much in control as if he was a barn-yard fowl. When Lafayette was about making them a visit, they caught one in a trap, and tying him fast by the leg, had him quietly roosted on a triumphal arch, as an emblem of American liberty; when the hero passed, the augurs pronounced that the royal bird cast down a look of hopeful promise. It is probable under these circumstances that none would have doubted as to the four eagles over the Capitol, but that many of those who saw the birds do aver that they were turkey buzzards! We hope that Messrs Gales & Seaton, as their paper circulates most extensively, will enlighten the world as to this important concern.

Those who, from want of acquaintance with the two species of the feathered tribe referred to, shall be unable to form a satisfactory conclusion, may see the true type of the grand national eagle at the head of this column, hovering over the metropolis of our editorial empire.

National Aegis March 16, 1825

The Roman "haruspex" specialized in using entrails for divination. Gales & Seaton, as mentioned above, edited the *National Intelligencer*. William A. Davis and Peter Force published the pro-Adams Washington-based *Daily National Journal*. Lafayette toured the U.S. as the last surviving Revolutionary general from 1824-1825. The column header of the Worcester, Massachusetts-based *National Aegis* was the eagle.

Eagles

The National Intelligencer gives an account of four large Eagles that hovered over the Capitol during the ceremony of Inauguration, on the 4th inst. —that one descended, made a number of circles round the dome, rose in graceful spirals, and passed off with the three others to the westward. The writer queries, whether curiosity drew them there, or whether the guardian spirit of our Union sent them, to indicate continued prosperity. Admitting the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul to be correct, we should give to the singular spectacle the following interpretation: The spirits of Adams, Clay, Crawford, and Jackson, when dislodged from their residence in those four Eagles; that of Adams claiming the largest, as his mind is more capacious than the minds of the others; and their westward course indicated that they will incubate among the clefts of the Rocky Mountains, or that Clay will be the next President.

New-Bedford Mercury March 18, 1825

Omens!

It is stated that, at the late Inauguration of President, four large eagles were seen poising themselves directly over the Capitol for about ten minutes, when one of them descended, and after making a number of circles around the dome, arose in graceful spirals, and all wheeled off together! We recollect there was at least one eagle in attendance, when Lafayette visited the tomb of Washington! At this rate, to use the expression of one of our brethren, "eagles must be as plenty in the vicinity of Washington, as crows are in New England."

Recorder and Telegraph (Boston) March 19, 1825

The National Intelligencer gives a cock and bull story about four eagles having been seen hovering over the capitol while the ceremony of Mr. Adams' inauguration was going on. This story shows that there are parasites about Washington city. The probability is, if any part of the feathered creation was attracted to the "grand spectacle," it was gulls; and our reason for this supposition is,

Birds of a feather
Will flock together.

Washington Review and Examiner March 26, 1825

This comment was originally printed in the *Harrisburg Chronicle*. "Birds of a feather" was widely used to refer to party politics.

Another “Fish”—no an Eagle story.—

The National Intelligencer, a paper proverbial for its wonderful and miraculous relations, gives an account of four eagles having been seen hovering over the Capitol, during the inauguration of President Adams. Now, we do not exactly recollect whether these birds of passage are indigenous to that part of the country or not, nor is it now our purpose to enquire. But late historians say that at some particular seasons of the year, it is no uncommon thing to see Turkey buzzards, even in the Capitol of the Union. We do detest the practice of some papers in giving circulation to such hobgoblin stories. What matter is it to us, whether there were four eagles, four fish, or four rats, seen in and about the Capitol, at the time of the inauguration of the President,—it makes him no better, nor no worse, in our esteem. But by the bye, if we had a choice, we should rather have it said that it was a dove. We account for these “fish” stories in this manner: That the late sudden political conversion of the editor, has partially impaired his intellects!!

Ballston Spa (New York) Gazette April 5, 1825

There is some danger of our becoming a superstitious people.—We are looking in the atmosphere for unusual birds, and to the heavens for strange appearances and we are in a good measure gratified. Thus at New York, when Gen. Lafayette entered the harbor, a magnificent rainbow illuminated the [unreadable] Lafayette. When Mr. Monroe was inaugurated, a mammoth eagle flew over the capitol. When Mr. Adams was assuming the office of president, four eagles hovered over the national senate house.—And one had previously looked from the clouds, on the effecting ceremony of General Lafayette's visit to the tomb of Washington. A star, at mid-day, cast its chaste brilliance on the rising cenotaph of De Kalb, at Camden. And the sun, which had remained behind the clouds on the day of Gen. Lafayette's entree into Charleston, shone forth with delightful brilliancy, just as he lit from his carriage at the city hall, to receive the intendant's welcome. These are grateful incidents, they are all of them well attested; but whether they intimate any peculiar relation between things above and things below, we leave to the decision of augurs and astrologers.

Hillsborough Recorder April 5, 1825

This was credited to the *Charleston Courier*, but I am unable to find the original.

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